

ARTS EDUCATION

Big Sky Arts Education

By Emily Kohring
Director of Arts Education
bigskyartsed.wordpress.com



Reflecting on A Shared Endeavor

Recently, a coalition of twelve national organizations led by the State Education Agency Directors of Arts Education (SEADAE), called on policy makers and the public to re-examine support for quality arts education in a document called Arts Education for America's Students, A Shared Endeavor (download the pdf at seadae.org).

According to SEADAE's press release,

A Shared Endeavor defines what quality arts education looks like at the local level, encourages partnerships, and calls on organizations and individuals to actively support and promote:

- Policies and resources for arts education;
- Access to arts education for all students;
- Collaboration between school-based arts educators, other subject area teachers, and community-based artists and arts educators; and
- Long-term advocacy partnership between all providers of arts education.

The 12 organizations, which include the National Association for Music Education, the National Art Education Association, American Alliance for Theatre and Education, the Kennedy Center, and the National Education Association, among others, believe students benefit from sequential, standards-based arts curriculum, deep expertise and professional experience, and standards-based connections between the arts and other content areas.

Here are two things I take away from A Shared Endeavor:

1. There is no replacement for certified arts specialists in the schools. I appreciate that the document reinforces the importance of certified arts teachers with deep expertise in their subject area.

In many Montana schools, both urban and rural, and especially in elementary schools, you will often find few to no certified arts teachers in any subject.

The arts are often left to be taught by certified non-arts teachers who receive little professional development in how to teach any of the art forms. Or, the school scrapes together funds (often through the parent organization, or funding programs like the Montana Arts Council's Artists in Schools and Communities) to bring in a teaching artist to work with the students for a residency.

An artist residency is a wonderful opportunity for students to encounter professional artists, especially for children with little access to the arts, but artist residencies should happen in tandem with a building's arts specialist,

not in place of the arts specialist. The artist residency is almost always too short and limited in its scope to provide the equivalent deep, sequential arts learning that a visual art, dance, music or theatre teacher working full-time in the school can offer.

In parts of the country, this practice has sometimes also had the unintentional consequence of pitting teaching artists and certified arts teachers against each other. Teaching artists should be brought in to enhance and support school curriculum, never to replace certified arts educators.

2. Collaboration is critical in creating quality arts education for every student. Collaboration, more than money, creates great arts education in schools. That's collaboration between schools, districts and local arts organizations; and between certified arts teachers, certified classroom teachers, and teaching artists. It involves businesses and local funding entities, working in partnership to deliver a high-quality arts education for all students, not just the ones that are lucky enough to live in the districts that are rich in resources.

Arts organizations can bring schools access to cultural opportunities they might never encounter otherwise. Teaching artists and certified non-arts teachers can partner to create great learning experiences tied to the Common Core.

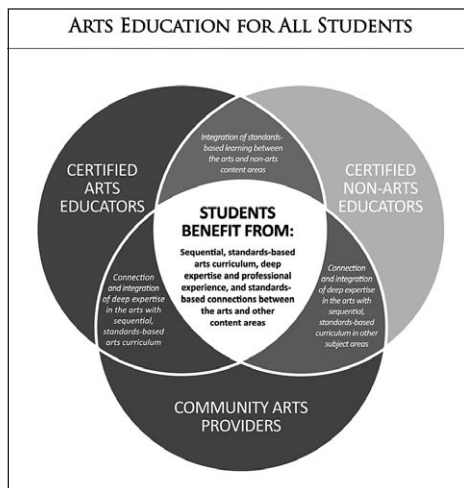
Certified arts specialists can enrich what they are already teaching by bringing in guests artists to share their unique talents with students. Businesses and local funding agencies can partner with schools to help them get the resources they are missing to provide quality arts learning to every student.

Everyone works toward a shared endeavor: the best possible education for all students.

It is an endeavor we must all share, because there is no high-quality education without the arts. I wonder who else can share the endeavor with us besides artists and educators? We need parents, we need CEOs, we need scientists, we need policymakers.

How exciting would it be to see national organizations added to A Shared Endeavor who are outside of the arts or education field? Just imagine: What if NASA signed on? How about the National Academy of Sciences? How about the National PTO? Boeing? Apple? The U.S. Chamber of Commerce?

Imagine if this endeavor was truly shared by all of us who are invested in the future of our children.



VSA Montana presents workshop on autism and the arts in Conrad

VSA Montana, the state organization on arts and disability, in partnership with the Montana Arts Council, presents "Working in the Arts with Children on the Autism Spectrum," a full-day workshop for teachers, paraprofessionals, teaching artists, and arts organization staff, April 5 at the high school in Conrad.

The workshop includes a morning discussion of characteristics and behaviors of children on the autism spectrum and interventions to help engage learners in the classroom setting, led by Brett Gillo of Big Sky Therapeutic Services in Great Falls, who works extensively with children on the spectrum.

The afternoon includes hands-on arts activities that support the participation of children on the autism spectrum led by Marlene Schumann, an experienced arts educator who specializes in assessment strategies for learners of all abilities.

This full-day workshop is free for participants. Renewal units are available for teachers. To register, contact Cynthia Wood, executive director of VSA Montana, at 406-549-2984 or info@vsamontana.org

OPI and MAC partner for professional development workshop

The Office of Public Instruction's Indian Education for All office and the Montana Arts Council are co-sponsoring a special workshop, "Art Therapy for Art Teachers Serving American Indian Students," March 27-29 on the campus of Salish Kootenai College in Pablo.

This three-day professional development experience, taught by licensed art therapist Jennifer Thompson, offers teachers working in schools on or near Montana's Indian reservations tools to help Native American students achieve personal development goals. These include hands-on techniques and new strategies based in art therapy.

The class is open to certified art teachers working with Native American students, or teachers who are comfortable making art and desire to integrate art into their teaching practice to benefit Native Americans.

Registration is free, but limited to 15 participants. Travel, lodging and substitute teachers will be reimbursed by OPI.

To register, contact Joan Franke at OPI, 406-444-3694 or jfranke@mt.gov. For details, contact Emily Kohring at MAC, 406-444-6522 or ekohring@mt.gov.

Helena hosts Poetry Out Loud state finals

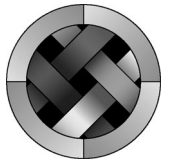
The Montana Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts present the Poetry Out Loud State Finals at 9 a.m. Saturday, March 1, at the Myrna Loy Center in Helena.

Poetry Out Loud is a national recitation competition that encourages high school students to memorize and perform great poems. This year, more than 80 Montana urban and rural high schools are participating. Each high school holds a school competition, with winners moving on to regional competitions in Missoula and Butte. Finalists gather in Helena March 1 for the chance to become the state champion.

The Montana Poetry Out Loud champion wins a trip, accompanied by a teacher, to the national finals in Washington, DC, April 28-30, with the chance to win college scholarships of up to \$20,000, as well as poetry books for his or her school.

The finals are free and open to the public, and include three rounds of competition, with the final round beginning at approximately 12:45 p.m.

For more information, contact Emily Kohring at the Montana Arts Council, 406-444-6522 or ekohring@mt.gov.



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Education budget offers arts opportunities

School districts across the nation had to make hard decisions last spring when sequestration cut funding to federal programs like Title I by \$800 million nationally. Other large federal education programs supporting special education and teacher training were also cut. Fortunately, the Congress passed legislation that funds the federal government for the remainder of this fiscal year and nearly restores many of these painful cuts.

Arts advocates with good working relationships with their school districts may want to discuss the opportunity to use a portion of these partially restored funds to incorporate arts education into their Title I and teacher training programs.

While districts will still face fiscal pressures, determining how to spend previously cut funds could be an opportunity to make these critical improvements to the instructional experiences of students and teachers alike.

"Being flexible and 'on the scene' can make a difference between the arts being included or not," notes Janet Brown, president and CEO of Grantmakers in the Arts.



The Artists' Gallery in the Emerson Center for Arts and Culture in Bozeman is opening its doors and gallery walls to a joint exhibit with the children from Longfellow Elementary School in March. The gallery will choose up to 50 Longfellow student pieces to display, alongside the art of the gallery artists, from Feb. 25-March 24.